

I Can't by Rosy_el

Series: [The Sunshine Boy and the Snowflake Girl \[16\]](#)

Category: Stranger Things (TV 2016)

Genre: F/M, Fluff and Angst

Language: English

Characters: Eleven (Stranger Things), Mike Wheeler

Relationships: Eleven & Mike Wheeler

Status: Completed

Published: 2016-10-31

Updated: 2016-10-31

Packaged: 2022-04-01 21:29:23

Rating: Not Rated

Warnings: No Archive Warnings Apply

Chapters: 1

Words: 1,785

Publisher: archiveofourown.org

Summary:

He heard her whimpering when he reached the kitchen.

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Author's Note:

Not the typical Halloween post but if anyone has any ideas I could maybe write a quick one before midnight, lol :)

I got a message from browneyesparker a few days ago asking for a fic based on Hamilton's "That Would Be Enough," specifically on the line "Let me be a part of the narrative." I am totally new to Hamilton and this was my first exposure to it. The song is incredible so you should definitely listen to it. I hope you like this and I hope it does the line justice.

February, 1991

He heard her whimpering when he reached the kitchen. Mike quickly realized he had forgotten his CDC identification by about the second flight of stairs down on the way out of his apartment complex.

He had blown out that famous Mike Wheeler sigh to the empty stairwell and turned on his heel, running back up the stairs by twos. He fidgeted with his keys before shoving the correct one into door 561's lock. He could hear her soft whimpering by the time he reached the kitchen.

Mike dropped the little access ID card back onto the counter, removing his backpack simultaneously, quietly laying it on the floor. He followed the sound of muffled crying to their bedroom but she wasn't there. So Mike walked another five steps into the spare bedroom—well, it wouldn't be spare in a few months' time, he reminded himself warmly—and gently pushed the door open.

There she was, sitting in the rocking chair his mom had gifted them for Christmas, her back turned to the doorway. Her crying was much more audible now.

"El?" Mike murmured, pushing past the door, his gut twisting sharply

and face falling all at once. She twitched, surprised, and then tried to wipe her face before he could see her, still turned away, facing the wooden crib that they still hadn't painted white yet: a request El had shyly vocalized.

El trembled and her words choked in her throat. "Mike?" She was still in her pajamas: one of Mike's old MIT shirts and pale pink shorts, feet covered in blue and black striped socks. Her short chestnut hair was messy and her cheeks were flushed. Mike loved her in the mornings. Well, Mike loved her all the time. Still, there was something about how softly raw she looked in morning when he woke up first and turned over to see her there, bare-faced and mused hair strewn across the pillowcase, thick pink lips parted and delicate breath escaping her mouth. He had a bad habit of rationalizing that he'd just skip breakfast so he could lay there a few minutes more. "I thought you left," her foggy voice tilted up at the end and it came out sounding more like a question. Her eyes were bloodshot and wet and she was chewing her lip restlessly.

"What's wrong?" Mike asked, anxious worry stitched in his words as he crept closer, like El was a wounded fawn in the woods. She had a similar fear in her eyes as she cast them anywhere but at her husband. He got down on his knees and took her hands in his, rubbing circles onto her knuckles with his thumbs.

After a minute or so her big brown eyes reluctantly met his. They were clouded with unshed tears and her nose was tinted red.

"El," Mike searched her face, begging. "Please talk to me." He always had a way of shattering her when he did that. Without fail, it sent her drowning in the memory of her year in the Upside-Down, when he had searched that seemingly empty fort in his basement the same way, eyes frantic and desperate.

"Eleven," he whispered.

She could feel her lip quiver and a tear follow it, tracing a hot line down her cheek. "I'm sorry," her voice shook and she dug her fingers into her knees, willing herself to stop, to just calm down. But she felt anything but calm.

"What are you sorry for?" His voice was smooth and patient and made El feel like crying more. She did.

"I don't know if I can—" her voice finally cracked into a strangled sob and the tears were coming faster now. Mike was still kneeling, his hands wrapped around the outside of her thighs. She sucked a breath in. El sniffed and studied the man who still looked awfully like a boy to her. Her fingers played with the collar on his pale blue button-up. "Look at you," she smiled crookedly and felt salt on her tongue. "You're so good, Mike Wheeler. You're so *good*."

Mike shook his head and felt her forehead. It didn't feel particularly hot by any means and she laughed brokenly at his gesture.

"You're so *good* and I'm—I'm," she tried to breath calmly but everything coming into her lungs was ragged and dragging—tearing—at her throat. "I don't think I can do this," she bawled. "I can't." She wept, one hand gripping the armrest of the wooden chair and the other pressed tightly to her stomach. "I can't," she repeated through her tears. "I'm so scared that—that—"

"El, El," He rubbed her thighs and grabbed her hands, willing her to just breathe and look at him. "What are you scared of?"

She brought her eyes to his and didn't even have to open her mouth.

"You're scared of being a mom?" His face crumpled when it sunk into him. "And you're afraid that the baby will be like you, aren't you?" His eyebrows were drawn together and a smudged frown bent his mouth and all she wanted to do was smooth all the creases out and not worry him but all she seemed capable of was worrying him and she hated it.

El nodded morbidly, eyes cemented on the carpet.

"Oh, *El*," he breathed, shaking his head at the floor. It made his hair fall into his eyes a little. "If this baby has a fraction of you in them, the world won't know what hit it," he grinned brightly, placing his hands on her stretched 7-month belly.

She took a shaky breath. "But the—the abilities, they come with fear

and hate and exploitation, Mike! The world rejects what it doesn't understand. Our baby shouldn't have to take that on because of *me*," she spat the word like acid.

Mike took her face in his hands and stood up. "I didn't reject you."

She scoffed and wiped at her already-red nose. "That's because you're *you*. It doesn't count."

"I'm not afraid. I'm not afraid of what this baby will be or won't be or how the world will see them because none of that matters. I loved you pretty much from the second I saw you, El Wheeler. No one's even seen this baby—I mean, we don't even know if it's a girl or a boy yet—and look at how much we already love them." He brushed a tear away from her lip with his thumb.

El slowly nodded and smiled, bringing her hand on top of Mike's, rubbing his fingers with her own. Then the smile that had reached her mouth started to fade again.

"How am I going to be a mom?" Fear reentered her eyes. "I never even had a mom! How am I supposed to take care of another human being if I can't even keep it together when I think I'm alone in the house?!" Her eyes grew wet again and shame consumed her chest.

"You are going to be the best mom any baby could ask for, El." His eyes, though dark as ever, were filled with a light that burned at El's heart. "You know how I know that?"

"No," she whispered.

"I know that because you are full of love, El." His smile was so full of warmth it made El feel like she could burst if he didn't look away. "You're the most selfless person I know."

"That's not true."

A small smile played at the corner of Mike's mouth. "I know who I married."

She still looked unconvinced and frowned timidly at the crib.

"I still can't believe I get to be a part of this story, you know?" He said it quietly, drawing El's soft attention.

"What story?"

He caught her hand and played with her fingers. His smile held the same playful intensity it had when he was only twelve as Dungeon Master during campaigns with his best friends. "The one about the little girl with super powers who fought the bad men and killed a monster and lived in hell for one year and then came back to the stupid kid who cried every day she was gone," he grew quiet at that part, a faraway look in his eyes. "I don't know why you let me be a part of this story..." He swallowed and then his gaze flickered back to her. "But please let me stay until the end."

She looked up at him with wide eyes and wiped a stray tear away from her jaw. El stared at him like he was the first snowfall she had ever seen.

"Okay," she whispered.

A smirk pulled at Mike's mouth as he took her by the elbows to help her out of the chair. "Okay?" He kissed her because he couldn't help it. "That's all I get?"

El smiled and her eyes crinkled, pushing two more tears off her eyelashes and down her nose. But these didn't seem to be the sad kind, no; these were Mike tears.

"I love you," she corrected, pulling at his collar and pressing her salty lips to his. He smiled against her mouth and she hugged him tight around his neck. Her swollen stomach kept some space between them but it didn't stop her from clinging to him like he was her oxygen.

Because, well, that's precisely what he was.

She pulled away suddenly, guilt on her rounded face. "You're late to work!"

Mike shrugged. His somewhat-decent-paying internship at the CDC was about the last thing on his mind at that moment. "I'll call in sick," he grinned, a sharp glint in his eyes. "Besides, we haven't

watched *Star Wars* in a while.”

“We watched all three last week.”

Mike pressed a shaking hand to his forehead and mimed a phone in the other. “I’m so sorry,” he coughed gruesomely into the telephone made of air. “I’m feeling pretty sick today, I could try to come in if you really need me... oh, no? Okay. Looks like I’ll just stay home then.”

El giggled at his actually quite convincing acting—he’d proved a talent in theatrics from his days playing pretend as a kid (and as an adult)—and she shoved him in the chest. Her push against him sent her rocking on her feet, still thrown off by the significant extra weight clinging to her lower abdomen. Mike’s air phone fell as he reached out to balance her, slightly panicked, one hand on her stomach and the other on her back. “Woah,” he gulped. El breathed out nervously and then started to giggle all over again at the look on his cute concerned face.

“*Star Wars* it is.”

Author's Note:

So?

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